Yellowstone River Oil Spill Fact Sheet July 6, 2011

This fact sheet describes the federal response to an oil spill in the Yellowstone River near Billings, Montana.

What happened?

At approximately 11:00 PM Friday, July1, 2011, a break occurred in a 12-inch pipeline under the Yellowstone River 20 miles upstream from Billings, Montana. The ruptured pipeline is owned by ExxonMobil. According to the company, an estimated 1,000 barrels of oil entered the river before the pipeline was closed. The company has shut down the pipeline and no more oil is being released from it.

How far has the oil spread downstream?

An aerial assessment by the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service personnel identified oil deposited along the river bank, and pools of oil in backwaters and eddies along the north and south banks of the river. Evidence of oil was visible along the river for 45 miles downstream from the location where the pipeline broke, near Laurel, Montana.

What action is being taken to contain and cleanup the oil spill?

EPA is leading the response in close coordination with the state of Montana and other federal agencies. In that role, we are directing and overseeing cleanup activities. EPA has mobilized 50 emergency responders in addition to U. S. Coast Guard personnel from the Pacific Strike Team. In all, there are approximately 440 responders including those from ExxonMobil, the company responsible for the spill, on-site to assist in cleanup and minimize any potential health and environmental impacts from the spill.

The river has been divided into 4 sections for the purposes of responding to the spill. The first two sections encompass the 20 miles of river immediately downstream of the spill. EPA response crews and ExxonMobil crews overseen by EPA and the US Coast Guard are focusing initial cleanup efforts on these sections of the river.

Personnel are walking the shores and deploying absorbent booms and mats along the river banks to absorb oil that has pooled in slow water areas along the shore line. The absorbent material is then collected and properly disposed of.

EPA is collecting water samples along the river for water quality analysis and monitoring air quality.

EPA is coordinating its response actions with the Department of Interior, Fish and Wildlife Service and state and local agencies and will take all steps necessary to ensure that ExxonMobil, as the responsible party, addresses any and all potential impacts of this spill.

The U.S. Department of Transportations' Pipeline and Hazardous Materials Safety Administration will determine the cause of the pipeline failure.

Have there been impacts to wildlife?

This stretch of the Yellowstone River is the home of the Pallid Sturgeon, an endangered fish species. Its banks also serve as nesting areas for migratory birds. If residents see birds covered with oil, they should call Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks at

406- 247-2940 or the Wildlife Hotline at 800-259-0596.

Is drinking water affected?

Downstream water systems were notified soon after the spill and closed their intakes. EPA is working with municipal drinking water systems to test water quality in the river near their intakes to confirm no residual oil in the water systems.

How can residents protect themselves from oil-contaminated water?

Here are some tips residents can follow to protect themselves from exposure to the spilled oil:

- Pay attention to local authorities and avoid areas affected by the oil spill. The oil could cause health problems, including skin and eye irritation or breathing problems.
- Keep your pets from entering oil-contaminated areas.
- If you get contaminated water on your skin, wash it off immediately with soap and water or a hand cleanser meant to remove oils and grease.
- If you accidentally drink some oil-contaminated water and symptoms such as nausea, vomiting or dizziness occur, seek medical attention.

How has the oil spill affected the air?

Some people have noticed a strong odor near the area where the pipeline ruptured and along the river and backwaters impacted by the spill. We would expect that these odors would decrease as more of the spilled oil is recovered. If you smell a "gas-station-like" odor, you may be smelling volatile organic compounds, or VOCs. The VOCs in oils are benzene, toluene, ethylbenzene and xylene. EPA has begun air sampling using real-time monitors that look for VOCs and hydrogen sulfide in the divisions where cleanup is occurring. No detectable levels of these compounds were seen. We are also deploying additional air samplers at specific locations to ensure the continued protection of the community and emergency responders.

Is the odor dangerous?

It is important to understand that people are able to smell some VOCs and other oil-related chemicals at levels much lower than would cause long-term health problems. Some of the chemicals that cause odors may cause head aches, dizziness, nausea or vomiting. If you are sensitive to these chemicals, stay indoors. If possible, close windows and doors, turn your air conditioner on and set it to a recirculation mode. If you have severe nausea or other medical issues, please see your health care provider as soon as possible.

What should I do if I find oil that I think may be from the spill on my property?

Call ExxonMobil's claims phone number: 888-382-0043. A company representative will come out and assess what needs to be done to cleanup your property.

Where can I get more information?

EPA, other Federal responders and the company update local government and the media regularly. Stay tuned to your local radio and television stations and news paper web pages for the most up to date information on the response.

For more information:

Visit EPA's web site:
http://epa.gov/yellowstoneriverspill
EPA Public inquiries: 303-312-6015
(8:00 AM-4:00 PM Weekdays)
EPA Media: 406-351-9014
Unified Health Command
www.riverstonehealth.org
Vendors: J.C. Harris, ExxonMobil: 832-457-7225